

## Ask Your Therapist

By Krishnabai, MSW, LICSW, the Ashby Center for Counseling

### **Stress Reduction for Stressful Times**

The most important part of stress reduction is this: identify the stressors in your life, change what you can, then either adapt or come to some peaceful acceptance of the things you can't change.

To get started, make a list of your stressors. Note your feelings about each item on the list. Rate the items from Most Stressful to Least Stressful. Now decide which category (I can do something about this, I can't do anything about this, I did something about this already) each item belongs in. See if you can pick the easiest items from the list of things you can do something about, and then take positive action. See if you can make some headway with one or more items so that you get a feeling of momentum going, even if it is something as simple as dropping that box of old clothes you keep tripping over in your hallway to the donation box. Everything helps! Then pick the not-so-easy items and work on them a little at a time. Baby steps work every time.

Here are some other thoughts to help you with your stress: avoid unnecessary stress, take charge of situations, adapt to stressors and accept what you can't change.

Avoid unnecessary stress. Set appropriate boundaries with demanding people. Turn off the news! Stay away from negative people (or ignore them if you can't avoid them). Let go of unrealistic goals. Stick to the basics right now. Reduce clutter in your home, your workspace and clean out your car.

Alter situations when you can. Express your feelings instead of swallowing them. Learn to compromise. Be assertive, not aggressive. Learn to manage your time. Stop being late to reduce the stress of being late. Don't isolate yourself from supportive people.

Adapt to the stressors. Reframe problems into challenges. Keep the Big Picture and don't get focused on negative details. Rethink your standards for now. Focus on the positive. Eliminate self-defeating thoughts.

Accept what can't be changed. Don't try to control other people or situations. Look to the upside - what did you learn? Share your feelings and listen to the feelings of others. Learn to forgive and move on.

Make time for FUN! Go outside! Work out. Play with pets. Look up at the stars to "right-size" your expectations and perspective on your life.

Take time to relax. Connect with people who are good for you. Move towards joy and away from fear, negativity, gossip and the deadening effects of cynicism. Keep your sense of humor, especially towards yourself. Tell yourself three things you feel grateful for each day.

Eat a healthy diet. Reduce caffeine and sugar. Reduce or eliminate alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. Get enough sleep. Stretch before you get into bed to help your body relax. Use visualization, meditation and prayer to help relieve your stress.

Deal with underlying emotional/mental problems with a trusted friend or professional counselor if needed.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to [www.krishnabai.com](http://www.krishnabai.com) where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.